

Remarks at the Congressional Friends of Ireland Luncheon
March 17, 2022

The President. Thank you very much, Nancy. That was very kind. Thank you. Thank you, thank you, thank you. Thanks.

Father, before I begin—bless me, Father, for I'm about to sin. *[Laughter]* I—well, I just want you to know, I may be Irish, but I'm not stupid. I married Dominic Giacoppa's daughter. *[Laughter]* Okay? *[Inaudible]*

Look, thank you very much, Nancy, for that very gracious and very over-the-top introduction. I appreciate it very much.

You know, I just got off the—on the way up, before I came up here, I was on the Zoom, as we say, with the Taoiseach for about 45 minutes. And he is—he's looking well, he feels well. He's tested positive, but he feels well. He looks good. And he wanted to—I know the Ambassador is here to bring his regards, but he is—he's really sorry he can't be here, and he was looking forward to it, as was his wife.

You know, the good spirits and feelings, as well, that exist on St. Patrick's Day seems to be one of those few times and not—well, not—I shouldn't say "a few"—we should have more times like this where Democrats and Republicans get together, and we actually not only agree on one thing, but we remind ourselves we actually like each other. *[Laughter]* And it's a useful thing. And, I—*[applause]*—you know, Yeats wrote, and I quote, "Talent perceives differences; genius, unity." "Talents perceives differences; genius, unity." And, you know, I think today we can add a fifth item to at least my unity agenda, and that's support of our relationship between Ireland and the United States, which has taken on an even more intense and cooperative form than it ever has, because of Ireland's neutrality.

On this issue, it brings together Speaker Pelosi, Leader McCarthy, Richie Neal—who is Irish, as we say where I come from, from the belt buckle to shoe sole—*[laughter]*—and—and the leaders of both our parties, and all the Friends of Ireland.

I—you know, I'm the proud son of Catherine Eugenia Finnegan Biden. And like so many Americans of Irish heritage, I love Ireland and I was raised in a circumstance where you would have thought my whole family—none of—they came in 1844 and 1845, but you'd think they'd all lived in Ireland the last 60 years—the previous 60 years.

The—there's—as I was talking to Taoiseach today, the Irish on St. Patrick's Day think that—Irish Americans think they're more Irish than the Irish. And—but that's kind of how I was raised, like so many Americans of Irish heritage, like other people of other heritage as well.

I was—it was imbued in me to be proud of—proud of my heritage. And, you know, the pride that was passed down to generations of our family, even though they've been here since the mid-1800s. And it was just part of the air we breathed, especially up in Scranton and—where we lived with my—near my grandpop.

My grandfather, Ambrose Finnegan, used to say—and I mean this—he'd say, "Joey, if you're lucky enough to be Irish, you're lucky enough." *[Laughter]* Every time something bad happened, I'd go, "I don't—I'm not sure." *[Laughter]* Anyway.

But because of being an Irish family, family was everything. My dad's expression was, "Family is the beginning, the middle, and the end." And—and he meant it.

And—but, you know, the faith we share with one another and the resilience that we've all gone through, both in America and in Ireland, you know, are ones that we've been knocked down sometimes. Just knocked flat on our back.

And my—my mom's expression, for real, was: "Joey, get up. Just get up. Get up." It's a simple proposition. It was sort of the Irish of it. You just get up, no matter what. Dust yourself off and move. Not—we're not the only culture that has that view, but it was imbued in my family.

And the other one was that—and I mean this sincerely—my dad's: "No one is better than you, and you're no better than anyone else." Not a joke. "No one is better than you, but you're no better than anyone else." And it's real. It's real. Because we were taught never—as my mother would say, "Never bow, never bend, never yield."

But the truth of the matter was that in the days when my parents and grandparents were growing up in the coal country of Scranton, being Irish was less than a badge of honor.

My great grandfather Blewitt, on—my grandmother Finnegan's maiden name—was only the second Catholic ever elected to the Senate in the State of—in the State of Pennsylvania. And that was 1907, and only the second one. The first one was in, I think, 1838 or 1840.

The point was that, like many cultures, like many folks, where you came from was either viewed as an asset or a liability. And where—you know, but the point is that everything that we were taught—and I'm sure all of you of Irish background, and other backgrounds as well, were taught that—that, you know, it's all about striving for a better future; that you can do better—just simply do better. And you know—and you can do it while you cherish the past. Now, you don't have to forget the past, or disassociate yourself from it, but cherish it.

You know, these are the values of immigrants not only from Ireland, but from—like my great-great-grandparents when they were brought here—brought themselves to the United States. But today, it's only part of what it means to be Irish. There is an indelible part of it that is American, because the values are the same, in my view—the values built into our Constitution that we are the—I—you heard me say last night: I think we're the most unique country in the history of the world. We're the only country based upon—organizationally—not geography, not ethnicity, not race, not religion, but on a notion, an idea that we hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men and women are created equal, endowed by their Creator, with certain inalienable rights: life, liberty.

I mean, that's the basis of why we formed this country. No other country has ever been based on a notion like that. They've incorporated those notions, but the basis for their organization has been their ethnicity, their religion, their geography—whatever—but not here.

And I know I say it, and many of you say—and I think people wonder whether we really mean it: I really think the source of our strength is our diversity. The source of our strength is our diversity.

And, you know, there are values that immigrants from Ireland brought and—but they're—as I said, they're not only—they're not only Irish values, they're values, I think, of the vast majority of immigrants who come to the United States.

And I'm proud to say that the bond between Ireland and the United States, by the way, has grown deeper and stronger over the years. For real. And we've navigated a once-in-a-century pandemic together. We've grieved the loss of too many people in both our countries. And we worked to rebuild our economies and taken on the challenge of renewing and strengthening our democracy, because—again, I apologize for repeating myself, but I know many of you've heard me say I think we're at an inflection point in history. I think—and I mean that sincerely. And it

occurs every several generations. I think we're in a genuine struggle between autocracies and democracies, and whether or not democracies can be sustained.

And I—I'm going to be speaking to President Xi tomorrow. And he'll remind me that I told him—he remembers every damn thing I've said, unfortunately. *[Laughter]* But all kidding aside, we talk about the idea he—that he does not believe demo—democracies can be sustained in the 21st century because things move so rapidly, technology is changing so much, democracies don't have time to arrive at consensus. That's why autocracies will succeed.

Well, you know, and now—you know, we—you have Ireland stepping up not only in terms of the relationship with us but, you know, the Good Friday Agreement is built on political and economic progress that we've made together.

And I know some criticize me, but I've be—I have a good relationship with the Prime Minister of Great Britain, Boris. We always kid each other when we see each other. But the point is that I've made it clear that—I don't think I just speak for myself—the Good Friday Agreements are firmly, firmly, firmly, firmly supported here in the United States. And we insist that it occur, they be maintained because it's—*[inaudible]*—too hard.

The people of Northern Ireland have made significant changes as well. There's movement, as you've mentioned—the young kids you talked about—Protestant and Catholic—talking to how—I mean, how they've never known anything but being able to get along.

I remember the first time I—on my parents' 50th wedding anniversary, my brothers and sister, we got together and gave my—and we can work something out for you, Father—we gave my parents a trip to Ireland. And—but it coincided—I was going over to the Stormont talks. And so they said, "You take them, Joey." *[Laughter]*

And—but the point is that it was—it was an—a bit of an epiphany for my parents. They thought—you hear all the stories from your ancestors about this, that, and the other thing—some of it apocryphal, some of it real. But it was really amazing.

But when we took them to the north, it was interesting. We went up to the Stormont and—anyway, they—it was an interesting thing to watch—to watch the look on my mother's face and my father's face as we toured Ireland, to see both the things that they had heard that were consistent with what they heard, because you never know whether they—you know, there's exaggeration about, "Well, when—when this happened and that happened." But they came back more hopeful than they had ever been as opposed to—and that was a while ago.

But my generic point is that, you know, now you have Ireland and Great Britain, and, you know, the Republic standing together against a murderous dictator, a pure thug, who is waging an immoral war against the people of Ukraine.

And by the way, the Republic is paying a big price for this, a big number for supporting the strategy—for supporting the sanctions, including a whole range of things. This—it's not a minor contribution they're making in this effort. It's significant.

Ireland and the United States are working together. For the first time now, they're on the United Nations Security Council. Ireland is a part of the Security Council now and the European Union. And Putin is paying a big price for his aggression. And they are part of the reason this cost is going so high.

That's a little—you know, everybody talks about Germany having stepped up and changed the notions about being more leaning forward. But—and they have. Well, so is Ireland. So is Ireland—a neutral country. Ireland has stepped up and taking a hit for what they're doing.

And you—look, you know, ladies and gentlemen, the relationship between Ireland and the United States is a dynamic and, I think, essential partnership that—as much as it's ever been. And, you know, it's sustained and strengthened by the Friends of Ireland, in this room and all across the country. And, you know, the connections that link our people stretch back through history, and they forward—well forward, I believe, in the future.

You know, we share a common goal: a future of a greater peace, greater hope, greater security, and a greater sense of who we are as countries.

And, you know, I—my mother's expression, gotten from her grandfather, was, you know: As long as you're alive, you have an obligation to strive. And you're not dead until you've seen the face of God.

That's what I think of when I think of Ireland. All the troubles they've been through, they have never, ever, ever quit. Never, ever, ever, ever quit—not once. They've gotten up. And now they're beginning to at least have the benefits of all the hard work and labor they've engaged in, and they're becoming a real actor, Mr. Ambassador, on the world stage and at the United Nations.

And so I want to thank you, Mr. Ambassador, and I thank the Taoiseach today.

And I just—I should probably tell you that my mother, when I took—when we went to Ireland, and we were—we were in the south, and my father was a real gentleman. And his greatest regret was he never had a college education.

But if I were—if you or any one of you were coming back to Delaware with me and my dad were around or retired, and I didn't call him to tell him I was bringing you over to introduce him so he had a chance to put on a coat and a tie—because he would only see you that way—that was my dad.

And as we were going to Ireland—FitzGerald was the Taoiseach—and we walked in to have a picture taken. And my dad had his brandnew blazer that had a—a patch on of my brother-in-law, Jack Owens—who's Irish from—like you, Neal. And it was this patch—this crest. And it had Latin written on it. And I never took the time to look at it, although I had to take 4 years of Latin—3 years of Latin in the Catholic high school I went to.

And the Taoiseach—we're having our picture taken, and he said, "Oh, Mr. Biden"—he said, "I agree." And what it said in Latin was, "Don't let the bastards get you down." [*Laughter*]

Well, we can't let them get us down. You can't let them get us down.

Thank you for allowing me to come back home, come up here and speak. And thank you, Nancy, for the nice compliments.

Speaker of the House of Representatives Nancy Pelosi. As the President has to make a clean exit to go back to work, I wanted all of us to lift our glass to toast the President on this St. Patrick's Day.

Mr. President, this is a toast that I learned from my grandchildren; I've said it to our colleagues here before. And it goes like this. It's an Irish toast: Sing as if no one can hear you. Dance as if no one can see you. Love as if you've loved—never loved before. And live as if heaven is on Earth.

So when I said to them, "Is that a toast that is a tradition in the Kenneally family?" they say, "No, that's a sign that is in the Shannon Airport." [*Laughter*]

To the President. Happy——

The President. Thank you.

Speaker Pelosi. Thank you, Mr. President. Happy St. Patrick's Day.

The President. Well, my grandmother had one. She said, "May those who love us, love us. And those who don't, may they turn their ankle so we know they're coming by their limp."
[*Laughter*]

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:43 p.m. in the Rayburn Room at the U.S. Capitol. In his remarks, he referred to Abbot Thomas O'Connor of Our Lady of Glastonbury Abbey in Hingham, MA; Prime Minister Micheál Martin of Ireland, and his wife Mary O'Shea; Ireland's Ambassador to the U.S. Daniel Mulhall; President Xi Jinping of China; Prime Minister Boris Johnson of the United Kingdom; and President Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin of Russia. He also referred to his brothers Francis and James and sister Valerie Biden Owens.

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Names: Biden, Francis W.; Biden, James B.; Johnson, Boris; Martin, Michéal; McCarthy, Kevin O.; Mulhall, Daniel; Neal, Richard E.; O'Connor, Thomas; O'Shea, Mary; Owens, John T.; Owens, Valerie Biden; Pelosi, Nancy; Putin, Vladimir Vladimirovich; Xi Jinping.

Subjects: China : President; Congress : Bipartisanship; Congress : Congressional Friends of Ireland; Congress : House of Representatives :: Minority leader; Congress : House of Representatives :: Speaker; Coronavirus pandemic, international cooperation efforts; Diseases : Coronavirus, domestic prevention efforts; Economy, national : Strengthening efforts; Foreign policy, U.S : Diplomatic security, strengthening efforts; Foreign policy, U.S : Peace efforts, expansion; Holidays and special observances : St. Patrick's Day; Immigration and naturalization : Citizenship; Ireland : Ambassador to U.S; Ireland : Ambassador to U.S.; Ireland : Prime Minister; Ireland : Relations with U.S.; Russia : international and U.S. sanctions; Russia : President; Russia : Ukraine, airstrikes and invasion; Ukraine : Russian airstrikes and invasion; United Kingdom : Prime Minister; United Kingdom : Relations with U.S.; United Nations : Security Council.

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